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**Ngangbam Vedamani Chanu**  
Department of Textiles and  
Apparel Designing, College of  
Community Science, Assam  
Agricultural University,  
Jorhat, Assam, India

**Rickey Rani Boruah**  
Department of Textiles and  
Apparel Designing, College of  
Community Science, Assam  
Agricultural University,  
Jorhat, Assam, India

**Momita Konwar**  
Department of Textiles and  
Apparel Designing, College of  
Community Science, Assam  
Agricultural University,  
Jorhat, Assam, India

**Priyanka Borah**  
Department of Textiles and  
Apparel Designing, College of  
Community Science, Assam  
Agricultural University,  
Jorhat, Assam, India

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Rickey Rani Boruah**  
Department of Textiles and  
Apparel Designing, College of  
Community Science, Assam  
Agricultural University,  
Jorhat, Assam, India

## An analytical research on traditional attires of *Meitei* community of Manipur

**Ngangbam Vedamani Chanu, Rickey Rani Boruah, Momita Konwar and Priyanka Borah**

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### Abstract

The *Meitei* community of Manipur has distinctive cultural dresses. Varieties of handwork natural motifs identify the rich culture of the *Meitei* community. The traditional attires are incorporated with alternative creative designs to cater for the needs of modern customers. This research paper describes the main traditional attires include *Innaphi* (shawl), *Phanek* (sarong), *Pheijom* (Dhoti) and *Khudei* etc. which is commonly used by the *Meitei* community of Manipur.

**Keywords:** Attire, Meitei, Manipur, traditional

### Introduction

In the Northeast region of India, each tribe or community has its own specific dignity in designs or styles of traditional textiles and costumes. Manipur enjoys distinct fascinating traditional attires amongst textile zones in India. Manipur is a small state located in the beautiful north-eastern part of India. It is surrounded by neighbouring three states i.e. Assam in the west, Nagaland in the north, Mizoram in the tip of the southern part and has international borders with Myanmar in the south and east part of Manipur. In Manipur, various types of community or indigenous tribes- the *Meitei* including *Lois* (Schedule caste), the *Pangal* (Manipuri Muslim), the *Nagas* and the *Chin-Kuki* were populated together in the valley as well as the hilly region since many years. Each community has each own especial styles of traditional attire to adorn their respective origin which were practiced and inherited over generations to generations. Among the communities of Manipur, *Meitei* contributes for nearly 60 percent of the total population of the state (Zehol L., 2001) <sup>[2]</sup>. The unique traditional costume of Meitei shows the beauty, rich culture, art forms of designs related with the environment and habitat where they developed since the time immemorial. The present paper deals with the objective to study the traditional attires of *Meitei* community of Manipur.

### Methodology

The present paper is the result of field work undertaken during 2021-2022 at Sangaitel and Kachikhul in Imphal west and Bashikhong in Imphal east district of Manipur. Both primary and secondary data were collected including observation method to collect authentic information. Research schedule was used to collect primary data regarding traditional attires of *Meitei* community of Manipur and were collected from the elderly villagers particularly women and local handloom weavers. The secondary data were collected from the published and unpublished literature and also has been referred internet source.

### Results and Discussion

*Meitei* attires are deeply embedded with the unique identity in socio-cultural meaning of being *Meitei* among the different ethnic groups of Manipur and also India. The traditional clothes, motifs, cloth-patterns, styles of wearing confined a remarkable art form of myths; beliefs; nature and environment constitute the *Meitei* community (Sapha, Y. *et al.* 2018) <sup>[1]</sup>. Different types of *Meitei* costumes are made with numerous designs of fine and coarse fabrics mostly from cotton and silk fibres since ancient times (Barbina, R. 2014) <sup>[3]</sup>. For the time being, some designs and motifs of traditional attires are modified along with trend

designs as well as fabric materials rather than silk and cotton are also preferred for its usage and importance from the recent past years. Traditional costumes were differing according to the type of occasion and event. Most of the *Meitei* women are engaged in weaving and woven various hand work creative designs.

### Traditional attires of women

In Manipur, *Meitei* women's are embellishing with one of the most common traditional costumes includes a shawl known as *Innapphi*, a *Phanek* which is worn around like a skirt named *sarong* every day. *Innapphi* and *Phanek* that worn ordinarily are differ in designs, types of fabrics depending on their usage and importance from the attire that worn in festival, occasion and important event in the society.

***Innapphi*:** It is an upper garment to wrap around the upper body over the blouse or tops, mostly like a shawl. It has different varieties depending on types of fibre used, designs and motifs that effects the aesthetic value to the apparel and immense with great perfect fitness to the body. *Innapphi*'s are available in block, or with floral in different colours, pattern and design. According to the used of thread, it is classified into two types:

***Wangkhei Phi*:** The *Wangkhei Phi* is a woven fabric made from very fine white cotton yarn. The shawl is made by interlacing the weft and warp of cotton yarn with spaced from each other to produce the fabric fully transparent effect and many patches are incorporated by weaving with beautiful and attractive various designs in different sizes i.e. *Khoiroithek*, *Thangjing tangkhai*, *Kabok Chaiba*, and several others with *Moirang phi* design on both of its longitudinal borders. The fabric is subject to sizing through the application of a rice-based starch following by stretching to make the fabric stiff and in proper shaped. The weaving process involves two methods based on use of shuttles: fly shuttle loom and throw shuttle loom. In the first type, it is made as a complete fabric in a single piece. In the second method, the fabric is made in two pieces and then joined together by stitching to make it full fabric. The *Wangkhei Phi* is usually used only in the special occasions such as marriage ceremony, *Lai-haraoba* (worship of deities) (Fig.1) etc.



Fig 1: Wangkhei Phi

***Rani Phi*:** *Rani Phi* is a semi transparent fabric woven same as *Wangkhei Phi* but it is made with fine silk. The application of rice-based is not used in it. The *Rani Phi* is also used only in the auspicious events like marriage ceremony, *Naa-hutpa* (ear piercing ceremony) or *Chura-karan*, and *Chak-umba* (Weaning ceremony) etc. (Fig.2).



Fig 2: Rani Phi

***Phanek*:** is the ethnic wear and is just like a sarong (skirt worn all over the world). The Manipuri *phanek* is unique because of its unique style, design and color. The *phanek* of a simple variety made of cotton, silk, acrylic and wool different colours made up of two equal pieces, each provided with or without a border and joined together length wise of the unembroidered side. *Phanek* are mostly hand-woven and are available only in block colours or stripes and is usually worn on auspicious occasions or used as daily wear. A *phanek* has four categories according to the varied designs.

**1) *Phanek Achamba*:** A plain *phanek* in block different colours which is worn by *Meitei* women at home as daily wear and also worn by young girls as outdoor attire. It is made in the fly shuttle and throw shuttle loom.



Fig 3: Phanek Achamba

**2) *Pumgou phanek*:** A plain white or pink *phanek* with or without a thin striped border. The plain white *phanek* is worn by the priestess and the plain pink *pumgou phanek* is worn by the *Meitei* women on occasions of mortuary ceremonies and at times of prayers in temples.





**Fig 4:** Pumngou Phanek

**3) Mayek naibi:** It is of striped design of varied colours. The stripes are set horizontally throughout the body of the cloth and are hemmed in by a broad border of black on the top as well as bottom of the fabric. These borders are decorated with different embroidered motifs. All the *mayek naibi phanek* are made in the loin loom.

Traditionally the *mayek naibi phanek* were of only 7 distinct colors in earlier time which indicates the sevens *Salai* (Clan) of Meitei community: i) *Thambal machu* (pink), ii) *Higok* (scheme of dominant deep blue color), iii) *Khumjingbi* (scheme of dominant black color) iv) *Hangam mapal* (mustard yellow) v) *Langhou* (a scheme of black and white in equal breath of 5mm each) vi) *loirang* (scheme of white and light pink) vii) *Chigong lei* (amber yellow) Cotton, wool and silk are commonly used for making *mapan naibi*. When the whole body of *mapan naibi* is woven in floss silk, it is known as *phige phanek*.



**Fig 5:** Phanek Mayek Naibi

**Potloi:** *Potloi* is a bridal gown for *meitei* community and also wear in Manipuri dance known as Raas Leela. The shape of the gown is in a cylindrical form made up of thick board and cover with red cloth attached on the belt which is adjustable to worn it and also stitch over the blouse and the inner garment in abdomen of the body. The *potloi* is adorned with applique works using geometrical figures. The designs consists of *khoi mayek* (bee) designs made of red phirangjee with a thick bukram base laced over a golden

cloth and decorated with *charik chamaki* (sequins) and *nungsen konpham* (brass work).



**Fig 6:** Potloi

### Men's traditional attires

**Pheijom:** A long piece of cloth is worn around the waist and tied securely at the mid abdomen, with the lower part passed between the legs and tucked in at the back so that the knees are usually covered generally white coloured dhoti is used. It is worn at the time of auspicious occasions like marriage, *Naa Hutpa* (ear piercing ceremony) and *Shraddh* (death ritual) along with *pumyat*. There is no design on the dhoti except for a line at the border. While wearing a *pheijom*, pleats are made at the front which acts as the design. The mode of dressing differs from occasion to occasion.



**Fig 7:** Pheijom (Dhoti)

**Khudei:** It is a type of dhoti but shorter in both length and breadth. So when worn it is not folded properly and the lower border did not reach down below the knees. The *khudei* is about 2.50 meter long and less than 1 meter wide of cotton material. *Khudei* is found in chequer weaving design throughout the body of the cloth with plain border strips in district colour. This chequer design is shown in varying colour pattern and in varying sizes of the square. The check design in different schemes of colour combination characterized the artistic motifs shown in the *Meitei* male lower cloth *khudei*. It is also made in the fly or throw shuttle loom. This kind of lower cloth in the said design is used commonly in daily life.



**Fig 8:** Khudei

**Khamenchatpa:** *Khamenchatpa* has circular type of design which resembles large and small floral motifs and is believed to be the copy of the back of serpent. The design was imprinted on the silk dhوتي with deep purple colour and was given as a reward by Meitei Kings to men of merit. The design cannot be used by common people and it was strictly followed during the time of monarchy. The design is printed on the dhوتي using wooden blocks. This particular design was used only on dhوتي in the beginning but later it came to be used on shirts, *Innaphi* (shawl), *Khwangchet* (cloth worn around the waist over dhوتي) and turbans.



**Fig 9:** Khamenchatpa

**Pumyat or Kurta:** It was the upper garment like other Punjabi kurta. It is collarless and cuffless apparel. Generally people wore white colour kurta of cotton or terry cotton, but colourful kurta is also worn by the Meitei people.

**Lengyan phi:** A stole to hang over the shoulder in formal occasions.



**Fig 10:** Lengyan Phi

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## Conclusion

The rich design, unique, elegant and colourful traditional attires of *Meitei* community of Manipur indicates the high value culture developed in the ancient time. *Meitei* traditional attire have yielded place to modern attires under the influence of the changing times. Study about the traditional attire of a particular community will able to preserve and provide knowledge to younger generation. It can acknowledge them about the tradition, cultural value that has been exist since generation to generation and also it will help to identify by which belongs to the particular community across the world.

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